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Teaching managers : learning, research and workplace practice

Caroline Rowland and Roger Hall

Abstract

Purpose This paper explores the way in which professional management programmes are informed by research and workplace practice. The focus is on the areas of motivation, appraisal and the management of change.

Design/Methodology approach A longitudinal study using a mixed methods approach. Middle and senior Managers engaged on professional management programmes were surveyed on workplace practice. Literature reviewed included syllabus guidelines from professional bodies and selected core textbooks.

Findings A content analysis revealed that there was a lack of congruence between what is taught to managers and workplace practice. However, research was found to have an impact on teaching and indirectly it influenced individual beliefs if not organisational practice.

Practical Implications Conclusions indicate that professional management programmes are still failing to bridge the gap between syllabus content current research and workplace practice. There is little to show that the needs of Business are being satisfied compared to successful models embedded in other professions.

Originality/Value This paper suggests the value of adopting an integrated model that combines professional and academic teaching of management. It further supports the relevance of research to workplace practice.

Keywords Management Development, Workplace Practice, Performance Management

Paper Type Research Paper

Introduction

The age-old debate between liberal and instrumental education has resonances in deliberations about vocational training and education in the field of Management. A range of approaches to management learning has emerged, ranging from practitioner models, which mirror the teaching of Medicine to the use of critical theory and humanist concepts, which reflect a disciplinary rather than vocational emphasis. Notions of the currency and transience of knowledge have implications for both curriculum and research. As the lifespan of knowledge shortens, so the value of life skills is raised. The particular concern and focus for this research were the strategies and methods used for teaching management. Specifically the authors were interested in the extent to which teaching and learning are informed by current research and the impact which this has on workplace practice.

Context

Until the 1960s, Management education in the U.K. was disparate. Management was taught at a number of Universities usually as an adjunct to mainstream programmes of study. Management or industrial administration formed part of the syllabus of some professional bodies. In sharp contrast, in the United States, Management had long been a distinctive discipline within Graduate Business Schools.

This pattern was to change significantly during the 1960s, with the establishment of British Business Schools and the Masters degree in Business Administration (MBA), which has grown rapidly since. By 1997 it was offered in over a hundred Schools with 8,000 graduates annually. (Golzen, 1997: 1). Some ten years later there were 136 HEIs offering MBAs (www.find-mba.com) with over 30,000 students enrolled (ABS, 2009). The MBA approach, aimed at increasing a manager's ability to take good strategic decisions was not paralleled in other management teaching during the 1980s and 1990s. Professional bodies, whilst recognising new techniques, were unresponsive to new philosophies of management, current research and different methods of teaching and learning, such as case study analysis.

During the 1980s the continuing debate about how much management education contributed to the development of effective managers resulted in two reports (Constable and McCormick, 1987; Handy, 1987) and the establishment of the Management Charter Initiative (MCI), an employer-led body which developed competence-based standards for managers from supervisory to senior level. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's) derived from these standards have, since 1990, transformed the

traditional approach to teaching management on professional programmes. Knowledge and Understanding and competence-based programmes, were influenced by the standards (MCI, 1991; 1997; MSC 2004; 2008)). As these standards are employer-led it might be expected that they will reflect current employer concerns such as performance management.

Professional programmes of study have traditionally been located within Further Education rather than universities. The creation of universities from polytechnics and higher education developments in Colleges of Further Education have tended to blur the distinction. Nonetheless, a divide was still apparent at the end of the 20th century. Of 155 registered Institute of Management centres in 1997, only 12 were universities. Of these, 5 were in the 'old' universities (Institute of Management, 1997). By 2009 the picture had changed somewhat. The Chartered Management Institute had 401 registered centres of which 38 were universities. Of these seven were 'old' universities. (CMI, 2009) As a comparison, in 2009 the CIPD had 311 centres including 68 HEIs, of which 17 were 'old' universities (CIPD, 2009).

This sectoral divide has implications for the type of programmes being delivered and research, programme design and delivery. In the five years following the incorporation of Further Education Colleges in 1993, funding was cut sharply and staff reduced by 15,000 (Midgley, 1998; Mackney, 1998). This resulted in a reduction in guided learning hours for programmes, more part-time staff and increased class contact time for remaining full-time members of staff. Opportunities for research or other scholarly activity consequently diminished. In the eight years from 1998/999 to 2006/7 income for the sector increased by 66% and was £6.7bn in 2009/10. (AOC, 2008) However, according to the Association of Colleges the sector has more students than the university sector yet receives only 20% of DIUS funding compared with HEFCE's 31% (AOC, 2008). The introduction of Foundation degrees has tended to increase the amount of HE in FE, but developments in the universities such as the DBA, a taught doctorate, have tended to re-establish the sectoral divide. Research tends to be concentrated in a small number of older universities whilst professional programmes and vocational qualifications are located mainly in the college and private provider sectors.

Given the differences in provenance of the management programmes available in the UK and the differences in learners and cultures at the institutions providing the programmes, it is useful to ask whether there is a clear relationship between research carried out into management, what is taught on the programmes and what actually occurs in the workplaces of those participating.

Research questions

The connections between research, teaching and learning in professional management education programmes were explored against this background. Guiding questions included:

Is there a divide between research findings, teaching and learning and workplace practices?

To what extent are subject discipline research, up to date subject knowledge and understanding of workplace practice critical to the effective facilitation of learning?

In order to enable managers to manage more effectively does there need to be a shift in the role of management educator from functional expert to facilitator, tutor and coach?

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was used with documentary analysis, interviews and observation as its primary methodological tools. At the start of the research three topic areas were chosen as examples to reflect both techniques and orientations: appraisal, motivation and the management of change. These areas were still evident as major components of research, teaching and workplace practice during the final phase of the research. Literature reviews were carried out to establish current research findings and theoretical developments. In 1998 The Management Standards (MCI, 1997) and three Awarding Bodies syllabuses (NEBSM, 1997; IPD, 1997; IM, 1997b) were examined at four levels to identify learning outcomes. In 2009 the Management Standards (MSC 2004; 2008) and the syllabuses of three Awarding Bodies (ILM 2009; CIPD 2009; CMI 2008; 2009) were examined at four levels to identify learning outcomes. Professional programmes from ten institutions were scrutinised for insights into content and learning strategies. Assignments, reading lists, examinations and examiners' and

verifiers' reports were studied. Over a period of ten years (1998-2009) Management students at two institutions were questioned informally about existing workplace practices. In 1998 and 2009 over 100 managers were asked formally to reflect on organisational practice in the three areas. Content analysis was employed independently by both researchers and compared to identify recurrent themes. All participants were in full time employment as either middle or senior managers. The sample was a convenience sample representing both private and public sectors. All participants were aware of and consented to the research. Both authors carried out observations as tutors, lecturers, programme managers, internal and external verifiers, external examiners, QAA reviewers, Approval Panel Chairs and researchers. They also discussed issues with practitioners. Multiple data sources and member checks were employed to verify the trustworthiness of the data.

Findings

Findings are presented for the three topic areas in terms of current research, teaching and learning and contemporary workplace practice.

Appraisal

Formal appraisal systems began in the United States in the 1920's. Research since the late 1950's has shown that appraisals linked to pay were unhelpful and best separated (Meyer and others 1965; Geary, 1992; Robinson, 1992; O'Neill, 1995; Armstrong and Baron 1998).

Appraisal methods and remuneration have received considerable discussion in the past two decades. (Cumming, 1998; Schuster and Zingheim, 1992; Kessler and Purcell, 1993; O'Neill, 1995; Brown, 1995; Levinson 2003; Chen and Fu 2008). The assessment of efficiency and effectiveness and jobs without readily identifiable units of output are recognised as difficulties. Payment by results is influenced by bias, inaccuracy and variables outside the control of the individual and creates demotivation. (Oliver, 1996). Studies have found that appraisal or performance related pay impairs the chances of securing the commitment of poor performers. (Institute of Manpower Studies, 1993).

Financial constraints may also thwart worker expectations. No evidence currently exists from any controlled study in the U.K. or U.S.A. to show that long-term improvements in the quality of performance results from appraisal based extrinsic awards. Although much literature has discussed fundamental weaknesses in many appraisal systems, it has also shown that performance appraisal may prove to be an important factor in changing and improving organisational culture. However, no known organisation fully realises this potential (Koopman, 1991; Walters, 1995; Walsh, 2005). Research also indicates that the effectiveness of appraisal is mediated by individual personality (Kuvaas, 2006).

The complex relationships between performance, appraisal and reward are not specifically addressed within either awarding body syllabuses or supporting documentation. In 1997 the word 'appraisal' did not appear in the key words and concepts of the management standards (MCI, 1997). By 2009 although the word appraisal was not used explicitly, it was implicit in the standards and in the learning outcomes of the awarding bodies under the heading of Performance Management (MSC, 2004, 2008; CMI, 2008, 2009; CIPD, 2009; ILM 2009).

Appraisal interviews, framework and skills appeared at supervisory management level (NEBSM 1997) and the basic ingredients essential to the effective design and operation of performance review and appraisal systems in a Certificate syllabus (IPD, 1997). The Institute of Management (1997) Diploma syllabuses made no explicit reference to appraisal in the context of either assessment or development. By 2009 Performance reviews were embedded in syllabuses of the leading awarding bodies (CMI, 2008, 2009; CIPD, 2009; ILM, 2009). Despite the absence of specific guidance, many centres do explore issues in current research. The role of appraisal in both performance management and staff development is frequently covered together with discussion about the problems which dual-purpose schemes generate. The focus of appraisals (on character traits, behaviour or performance outcomes) receives consideration in core texts such as Marchington and Wilkinson, (1996, 2008) as do recent developments like 360 degree appraisals. Current texts refer to performance reviews rather than appraisal (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2008). The emphasis at lower levels is on skills and

techniques; at higher levels the problems associated with appraisal schemes are adequately ventilated. Formal appraisal systems were widespread among the student sample. Most appraisals were carried out by line managers on individuals. Self-appraisal formed part of the process in most organisations, but peer appraisal, 360 degree appraisal and team appraisal were rare. Many systems were driven by Investors in People initiatives, yet there was little evidence ten years ago of formal training of appraisers nor of formal guidance to appraisees. Recent samples showed a movement towards more training and guidance but this was still patchy. In most organisations appraisal was part of a performance management system, although training needs analysis was the most frequently cited function of appraisal. Appraisal was perceived almost universally as a control mechanism which is both subjective and inconsistent and, in the worst cases, leads to fear and demotivation. Where appraisal was associated with rewards these tendencies were exacerbated. Often, appraisals had and continue to have multiple functions which do not lie easily together. This leads to mistrust and scepticism, undermines confidence and inhibits commitment. The full potential of appraisal systems for enhancing individual development and increasing organisational learning is rarely achieved. In recent surveys a change in terminology and emphasis was noted. Appraisals were now described in the workplace and in texts as personal development reviews or performance reviews. However, when explored further, the process, purpose and outcomes were found to be the same as those in previous incarnations.

Motivation

Motivation has long been a central focus of management literature. Many of the themes identified by the human relations school in the 1960s are still currently debated including the psychological contract (Guest and Conway, 1997), employee involvement (Haasen and Shea, 1997), recognition (Boyle, 1995), managing creativity (Amabile, 1997; Kuvaas, 2006), empowerment (Beach, 1996), leadership (Gilley, 1997; Morden, 1997) and incentives (Bryant, 1996; Levinson, 2003; Holloway, 2009). Recent contributions emphasise process theories of motivation such as expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) rather than content theories with underlying assumptions of universality. Some research has focused on international motivational differences (Herbig and Genestre, 1997) and on developments in organisational learning and performance (Pearn et al, 1995; Longnecker and Fink, 2005). Beliefs about human motivation define organisational tone and culture, underpin reward strategies and create conditions which determine individual and group performance and achievement of organisational objectives.

Awarding body syllabuses refer to goal setting, individual differences, major theories of motivation, recognition and reward. There is ample coverage of both theoretical and practical issues in recommended texts which reflects current debates. The impact of 'the human relations school' is evident in the approach to much teaching of motivation on professional programmes. Yet, there is a tendency to emphasise content rather than process theories and to focus on the simple and universal rather than the complex and contingent. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) and Herzberg's motivator/hygiene theory (1966) have been the mainstay of programmes in organisational behaviour for four decades. It is interesting that as early as 1992 a modern Social Psychology text on Human Motivation (Weiner, 1992) contained no reference to either. It is as though Management as a discipline borrows concepts and models from other disciplines such as Sociology and Psychology and freezes them whilst these other disciplines evolve. Motivation may be taught with enthusiasm, yet it is often taught uncritically. Reliance on a firm body of established work often fails to contextualise the topic in a world of shifting lifestyles and organisational change where downsizing, outsourcing and casualisation create new motivational contexts for employees. Sustainable reward strategies based on established theories of motivation are rarely fully explored.

Four decades of human relations teaching may have resulted in humanistic concepts of motivation becoming the espoused theory of management tutors. Its impact upon the workplace practices experienced by our student sample was negligible. In this area of management education the greatest gulf between teaching and contemporary practice can be seen. Students are sensitised to what they see as poor motivational practices, but discounting this enthusiasm, we still have clear instances of ill-considered performance-related pay schemes, successive rounds of redundancies, increased work loads, autocratic management, stifled creativity, short term and temporary contracts, social isolation

and an increasing loss of control over the flow and pace of work. Few organisations have a theory in use which reflects the classroom views on motivation, nor are there any simple formulae to reconcile the often conflicting goals of organisations and individuals. The student sample consisted largely of highly motivated adult learners in management positions. They were frequently frustrated in their efforts to perform by organisational constraints. These same constraints also served to prevent them from allowing their own team members freedom to fulfil their own ambitions.

The management of change

Change has been a concern of organisation theorists for many years. It was the rapid social changes of the industrial revolution which gave birth to the discipline of Sociology through the work of Marx, Durkheim, Comte and Weber. It has been a recurrent theme from the days of scientific management to those of the learning organisation and knowledge management. Change features in the popular writings of management gurus such as Handy, Peters, Kanter and Kotter. Current research focuses on tools and techniques (Belbin, 1997; Tushman and O'Reilly III, 1997; Holloway, 2009) on case studies of organisational change (University of Warwick, 1997; Zell, 1997; Shanley, 2007) and on strategic change (Carnall, 1997; Tyson, 1998).

There is less emphasis on emergent models of change, more prevalent in other fields of sociology. Some authors, however, do challenge the dominant paradigm of unitarism and planned change with models which are pluralistic and emergent (Schein, 1985; Ruddle and Feeny, 1997; Mintzberg et al. 1998; Hughes 2006).

If the management literature on change is heavily skewed towards the tools and techniques of planned change, then this tendency is heightened in approaches to teaching change management. The management standards are essentially normative with performance criteria such as 'you achieve the results you anticipate from the changes within agreed timescales'. (MCI, 1997 A5.5f). This is reflected in the awarding body syllabuses, which refer to:- responses to change, gaining acceptance, handling conflict and overcoming resistance and in lesson plans, assignments, examinations and core texts (Financial Times, 1997; Johnson and Scholes, 2005). It is perhaps because Organisation Theory has become the province of Business Schools rather than a sub-discipline of Sociology that this approach has remained largely unchallenged in professional programmes.

Workplace practice in change management also follows the dominant paradigm reflected in both research and teaching. There is, despite often compelling evidence to the contrary, an almost universal conviction that managers should and can initiate and implement change. Approaches range along the tell/consult continuum and techniques employed vary in sophistication and modernity. Changes such as Total Quality Management, Investors in People, performance management, annualised hours, harmonisation of conditions, redundancy programmes and radical restructuring had been implemented in the organisations of our student sample. Without exception the change programmes had been management driven. Rarely, in the experience of the respondents, had sufficient attention been paid to the dysfunctions of prescriptive change through the anticipation of forces resistant to change.

Conclusions

Our findings show a clear divide between research, teaching and learning and workplace practices. The nature of the divide is dependent on the area of study. In areas which focus on the development and application of management techniques there is an alignment between research and workplace practices, not reflected in teaching and learning. In more theoretical areas like motivation there is a congruency between research and teaching which does not permeate through to workplace practices. During the past decade of this study there have been some significant economic upheavals; a recession accompanied by associated cutbacks. Management practice has espoused the notion of teamwork and employee engagement. Many organisations rely on discretionary effort by employees yet there appears to be little recognition of its importance in management paradigms. Respondents still perceived management as paying lip service to appraisal and appear to be equally cynical regarding the performance management agenda including motivation in theory and use. The Managerial discourse was seen to be a prevailing and often negative change imperative in most organisations, set against the backdrop of economic downturn. However, some change in reflective practice had occurred including

a growing use of action centred research and the emergence of professional doctorates including the DBA.

In routine areas neither teaching nor workplace practices tend to be influenced by research findings. In the workplace in particular this continues rather than abates.

This has profound implications for the role of the educator on professional management programmes. Subject discipline research is often too narrow to be of significant value to existing programmes. Up to date subject knowledge and an understanding of workplace practice is clearly essential if the divide is to be narrowed. Facilitation of learning, however, requires much more than functional expertise. As management knowledge expands, it becomes increasingly difficult for educators to have both the breadth and depth of knowledge which their students may need. Consequently, the role must shift to one where the tutor develops skills of facilitation, coaching and mentoring to enable individual students or groups of students to learn. At some centres, student-centred learning, action learning sets, open learning facilities and information technology provide a framework in which this may be achieved. Assignments which combine theoretical orientations with best practice approaches and workplace applications can provide learning opportunities which fulfil individual needs within the framework of awarding body requirements.

This approach can also provide learning and development for tutors, who, through student assignment work, maintain up to date knowledge of both research and workplace practice. The change of role suggests an emphasis on different skills. Although knowledge of the terrain remains essential, subject knowledge and the pedagogic skills associated with representational teaching diminish in importance. Knowledge of research methods, consultancy skills and information sources becomes of critical importance and skills of facilitating individual and group learning of adults become paramount. It is here where perhaps the focus of research might be and where scholarly activity might best be concentrated

Improvements in developing the ability of managers to learn and manage their own learning has much greater leverage than any amount of taught knowledge. Individuals have differing learning needs which cannot be satisfied through a focus on teaching.

These arguments have wider implications for institutions, awarding bodies and funding councils. There is a need to recognise that traditional teaching is not the only way in which learning takes place and to encourage innovative ways of facilitating the learning of adults through appropriate funding. In the area of management education there is also a need for government to move away from channelling the majority of funding to competence and practitioner programmes and to achieve a balance with more academic content.

Table I: Relationships Between Teaching, Research and Practice

| | Impact of teaching | Impact of research | Impact of practice |
|---------------------------|---|--|--|
| Impact on teaching | | Motivation: management research findings are explored in teaching and learning. Appraisal: research findings are used to inform teaching and learning. Change: research findings are addressed in some areas of teaching and learning but not in others. | Motivation: practitioner experience informs teaching and learning Appraisal: a sharp divide between theory and practice. Change: a sharp divide between theory and practice. |
| Impact on research | Teaching encourages practitioners to carry out (usually Type II) research into motivation, appraisal (or more generally, performance management) and change. | | All three areas have stimulated research for decades as practices have developed. |
| Impact on practice | Motivation: teaching influences participants' outlooks but does not modify organisational behaviour. Appraisal: teaching has little impact on theories in use. Change: teaching influences participants' outlooks but does not modify organisational behaviour. | Motivation: research informs espoused theories but not theories in use. Appraisal: for decades research has had little impact on practice. Change: there is little appreciation in practice of emergent change models | |

Finally, there has to be recognition that many organisation cultures modify the impact of teaching and learning. There are strong indications to suggest that many organisations favour the pragmatic, short term approach and have a tendency to marginalise the academic approach. Research is all too often discounted in favour of quick fix solutions.

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